

Issue: K-12 Education Funding in Arizona

Talking Points: K-12 Education Funding in Arizona

Education funding is the number one issue for Arizona voters, with polls showing it as the top priority for the past five years. Yet no state has made greater cuts to school funding than Arizona. Between 2008 and 2017, the Republican-dominated legislature cut per student spending by 37.8% and has made additional cuts to education funding totaling \$4.56 billion.

Underfunding Education Leads to Low Student Performance

Arizona's Republican lawmakers have repeatedly chosen to cut personal and corporate income taxes rather than investing in schools. In addition, the state has lost an estimated \$1 billion as a result of its tuition tax credit program, which provides tax credits for donations to support private school tuition scholarships.

As a result, K-12 funding in Arizona is currently below what it was twelve years ago. Per pupil funding is the *second lowest* in the country. At 905:1, the student to counselor ratio is twice the national average. Class size is over 30 in many elementary schools and over 40 in high schools. Arizona's present formula for special education funding is 40 years old and does not meet the needs of today's students.

Low salaries, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of resources have resulted in a poor learning environment and low achievement for Arizona's students. Arizona's high school graduation rate is 43rd in the nation, and only 55% of those who do graduate are enrolled in postsecondary education in the semester after graduating.

Low Teacher Pay Leads to High Teacher Vacancies

Arizona teacher salaries are the *third lowest* in the country. In 2018, Arizona's teachers earned 18.7% less in wages than comparable workers. Results of a survey conducted in December 2019 revealed that Arizona had 7,500 openings—almost a quarter of its teaching positions—with over half of the positions filled by individuals who did not meet standard teacher requirements.

Teachers Take Action: #Red for Ed and the Legislative Response

On April 26, 2018, teachers staged a walk out and demanded salary increases, a restoration of education funding to 2008 levels, a permanent salary structure including annual raises, and no new tax cuts. The #RedforEd action was successful in obtaining a commitment to raise teacher salaries by 20% over three years. However, the Governor and legislature refused to meet any of the other demands.

To combat the continued underfunding, supporters of public education have repeatedly attempted to launch ballot initiatives, which would provide additional funding for teacher salaries and school operations by increasing taxes on the state's wealthiest citizens. These initiatives have been thwarted by the state legislature.

Covid-19 Impact on FY21 Education Funding

More than half of the \$12.3 billion budget originally proposed for fiscal year 2021 was allocated to K-12 education funding; a promising step that nonetheless still would have left Arizona near the bottom of national rankings. However, with Arizona facing a huge budgetary shortfall as a result of COVID-19, the legislature passed a “skinny budget” in March before adjourning temporarily. This budget is about \$500 million less than the original proposal and has been stripped of virtually all new spending. Meanwhile, school districts have struggled with the transition to remote learning, which has only highlighted and exacerbated the opportunity deficit that exists for low-income, urban and rural students.

See www.localmajority.org/research-reports for our complete report: *The Deplorable State of Education Funding in Arizona* [AZ-K12 Education Funding - May 6, 2020](#).